United Nations A/72/115

General Assembly

Distr.: General
27 June 2017

Original: English

Seventy-second session
Item 35 (b) of the preliminary list*
Prevention of armed conflict: strengthening the role of mediation in the peaceful settlement of disputes, conflict prevention and resolution

United Nations activities in support of mediation

Report of the Secretary-General**

Summary

In its resolution 70/304, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to submit a report to the Assembly at its seventy-second session on United Nations activities in support of mediation in the peaceful settlement of disputes, conflict prevention and resolution. The present report is submitted pursuant to that request. It recognizes mediation as an important tool for conflict prevention, management and resolution; analyses five elements of mediation support, providing examples of United Nation activities within the framework of each element; and sets out the means through which the entities of the United Nations system can coordinate their support for mediation initiatives at different levels.

* A/72/50.

** The present report was originally submitted ahead of schedule, on Friday, 23 June 2017, at 4.28 p.m. Owing to formatting issues, a revised layout of the report was submitted on 27 June.

17-10503 (E) 070717

Please recycle

Contents

		Page
I.	Introduction	3
II.	Challenges to mediation	3
III.	Mediation and the surge in diplomacy for peace	5
IV.	United Nations activities in support of mediation	6
	A. Enabling environment	7
	B. Support for the mediation strategy and process	8
	C. Effective operations	12
	D. Support to implementation	14
	E. Capacity-building	15
V.	Conclusions	18

I. Introduction

1. In its resolution 70/304 of 9 September 2016, the General Assembly requested that the Secretary-General report to the Assembly at its seventy-second session on United Nations activities in support of mediation in the peaceful settlement of disputes, conflict prevention and resolution. The present report is submitted pursuant to that request.

2. With regard to the item on strengthening the role of mediation, the adoption of General Assembly resolution 70/304 was preceded by the adoption of Assembly resolutions 65/283 of 22 June 2011, 66/291 of 13 September 2012 and 68/303 of 31 July 2014, and the issuance of three reports. The first report (S/2009/189 of 8 April 2009) was prepared pursuant to a request by the Security Council, following its high-level meeting on mediation and settlement of disputes, held on 23 September 2008; the second report (A/66/811 of 25 June 2012) included the United Nations Guidance for Effective Mediation (annex I); and the third (A/70/328 of 19 August 2015) focused on cooperation between the United Nations and regional and subregional organizations on mediation.

3. In taking office as Secretary-General, I identified the inability to prevent crises as the most serious shortcoming of the international community, and have since reiterated my determination to prioritize prevention across the United Nations system. In my first address to the Security Council, on 10 January 2017, I placed emphasis on mediation as an important tool in this regard, informing the Council of my intention to launch an initiative to enhance the United Nations mediation capacity, both at Headquarters and in the field, and to support regional and national mediation efforts as part of my broader call for a surge in diplomacy for peace. In this report, I outline how the United Nations makes use of its capacities to support mediation while drawing on the diverse capabilities across the three pillars of peace and security, development and human rights. I also explain how I intend to strengthen our mediation support activities.

4. In the preparation of this report, the Department of Political Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat engaged with Member States of the regional groupings of the General Assembly as well as with the Group of Friends of Mediation. The Department of Political Affairs also consulted with representatives of international, regional and subregional organizations, the Mediation Support Network (a global network of primarily non-governmental organizations that support peace processes) and the academic community.

II. Challenges to mediation

5. The number of major civil wars almost tripled in the decade to 2015. Between 2011 and 2015, there was a sixfold increase in fatalities in conflict, with 2014 being second only to 1994, the year of the Rwandan genocide, as the deadliest year since the end of the cold war.[1] The total number of casualties remains historically high, although 2016 did see declines in the numbers of both armed conflicts and fatalities.[2] Displacement attributable to armed violence is at the highest level on

[1] See Marie Allansson, Erik Melander and Lotta Themnér, "Organized violence, 1989-2016", *Journal of Peace Research*, vol. 54, No. 4 (2017). Civil war is defined as "an armed conflict with over 1,000 battle deaths per year and involving at least one State actor".

[2] Ibid. The number of conflicts (including "minor" armed conflicts with over 25 battle deaths per year) rose dramatically, from 42 to 52 in 2015, before falling to 49 in 2016. A total of 104,000 battle-related deaths was recorded for 2014; this figure fell to almost 98,000 in 2015 and to a little over 87,000 in 2016.

record, involving more than 65 million people. Moreover, at least 20 million people are experiencing or facing famine in (northern) Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan and Yemen, all countries with protracted conflicts and access constraints.

6. The pressing need for mediation and other efforts to end the conflicts of today is as urgent as the requirement that we direct greater attention, efforts and resources to preventing the conflicts of tomorrow. However, in too many settings, political and other challenges constrain the prospects for success.

7. A first set of challenges are generated as a consequence of the nature of the conflicts themselves. State fragility, the blurring of lines among political, criminal and ideological interests, as exemplified by the emergence of complex economies of conflict, and the unclear objectives of increasingly fragmented armed groups create multiple challenges for mediation engagement and the development of the kind of formal process that might conclude with a comprehensive peace agreement. In many settings, the use of terror tactics and the presence of extremist groups whose maximalist goals defy negotiation contribute to a preference for a military and security-centred response which can create complications for a comprehensive political approach.

8. Second, there has been a substantial rise in the internationalization and regionalization of conflicts, significantly complicating their resolution. The number of internationalized conflicts increased 10-fold between 1991 and 2016;[3] in some instances, Member States are appropriating local and national grievances for their own agendas or fuelling proxy wars, thereby making conflicts bloodier, longer and more intractable.

9. Third, we have seen an unprecedented acceleration in the speed and spread of information. The continuously expanding media landscape has changed both how we communicate and how narratives take hold of the public imagination. While the revolution in communications has many positive features, the rapid relaying of unverified information on, for example, a ceasefire violation, can raise expectations of a response and contribute to conflict escalation. Meanwhile, the ease of publicizing confidential contacts on social media can, in some circumstances, hamper the ability of a mediator or facilitator to engage with parties to the conflict through the kind of low-key interaction needed to assist opponents in finding solutions to their grievances.

10. Fourth, peace agreements are under increasing strain and are frequently punctuated by relapses into conflict, a tragic phenomenon which has been witnessed in South Sudan. Sometimes, this is associated with a rushed and flawed agreement; sometimes, failed agreements reflect the distractedness of the international community which may have moved on to the next conflict or is unable to maintain a coherent line of support. Reaching an agreement is only the first stage in a longer process: implementation also requires sustained assistance, both financial and political. The actions — and inaction — of other States can help reinforce a mediated solution or detract from its success.

11. Finally, greater cooperation and convergence in the Security Council would positively impact and support the mediation efforts of the United Nations and facilitate negotiated settlements.

12. Mediation nonetheless remains an essential, flexible and effective tool which is utilized for conflict prevention, management and resolution by the United Nations

[3] Uppsala Conflict Data Program dataset, as analysed in Sebastian von Einsiedel and others, *Civil War Trends and the Changing Nature of Armed Conflict*, United Nations University Centre for Policy Research Occasional Paper No. 10 (Tokyo, United Nations University, March 2017).

and a wide range of other organizations and actors. While we often speak of the required or optimal conditions for mediation, they are rarely to be found. I recognize that it is our responsibility to try to identify and seize upon any possible window of opportunity for mediation in order to prevent or manage violent conflict and, eventually, build and sustain peace. This report outlines some of the actions taken by the United Nations to support such mediation efforts and identifies how we intend to strengthen our ability to deepen work in this critical area.

III. Mediation and the surge in diplomacy for peace

13. The unacceptable levels of suffering caused by violent conflict demand a surge in diplomacy, a facet of which is strengthening mediation capacity in the broadest terms. Existing tools in the United Nations system provide a good basis upon which to build. Yet more needs to be done. It is my intention to bring together the capabilities of the diverse actors in the Organization across the peace and security, development and human rights pillars so as to maximize our assets in support of mediation.

14. Mediation requires consistent political engagement. This means close attention to developments at the local, national, regional and international levels. As Secretary-General, I shall offer my good offices, drawing on the capabilities of my special envoys and representatives and other senior advisers, and engage personally wherever I can to help prevent and manage conflict. To reinforce these efforts, I am establishing a High-level Advisory Board on Mediation to provide advice and distinct perspectives on conflicts and peace processes. I am enlarging the pool of high-level envoys and senior mediators, with a focus on women mediators, in line with my commitment to reach gender parity at the senior leadership level by 2021. I will also work to increase the availability of mediation and facilitation expertise to peace operations, particularly in peacekeeping settings.

15. The complex nature of today's conflicts underscores the importance of building relationships and strengthening partnerships. The United Nations Secretariat has made good progress in advancing strategic cooperation with regional organizations, most notably through the Joint United Nations-African Union — Framework for Enhanced Partnership in Peace and Security, signed on 19 April 2017. But we can do more to leverage our comparative advantages and to establish platforms for effective collaboration, including through our regional offices in West Africa and the Sahel, Central Africa and Central Asia and liaison offices such as the United Nations Office to the African Union. A critical test will be that of the ability to forge common positions and cooperative strategies in places such as Libya and the Central African Republic, based on increased exchanges not only at the Secretariat level but also between the Security Council and decision-making bodies in regional organizations. Our strategies for political engagement must draw on comprehensive and integrated conflict analysis, including attention to the political economy of conflict and its gender dimensions, as well as on expertise to be derived from the broader United Nations system and external partners.

16. We shall also increase our support to and partnership with national and local actors, including through the engagement of civil affairs officers in peace operations and peace and development advisers deployed through the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the UNDP-Department of Political Affairs Joint Programme on Building National Capacities for Conflict Prevention. In different circumstances, national and local actors can facilitate local-level dialogues, lay the groundwork for formal peace negotiations, address recurring conflicts over issues such as land and natural resources, and help minimize electoral violence.

Critically, they are also able to help generate buy-in and support for peace agreements, including among women, and other constituencies, notably youth, whose inclusion is essential to achieving a sustainable peace.

17. The United Nations system exerts the greatest impact when it enables others. This conviction is at the core of my approach to mediation and the initiative I have launched to reinforce the capabilities of the Organization so that we can be responsive to the needs of partners. The sections below outline how we are currently prepared to support mediation efforts, which for the purpose of this report are understood broadly to include mediation, facilitation and dialogue.

IV. United Nations activities in support of mediation

18. Mediation, together with mediation support, comes in many forms. At the United Nations, it is always offered on the basis of consent. In some processes, a United Nations representative is the lead mediator or facilitator; sometimes, there is a joint envoy arrangement with a regional organization; more frequently, however, the United Nations plays a supportive role in processes led by regional organizations, Member States or, occasionally, a non-governmental organization. The nature and extent of this support can vary enormously.

19. The mediation teams of the lead entity are set up differently according to the needs of the process. [4] Mediation support is a distinct function entailing reinforcement and assistance in facilitating the work of the team, as required, and can be provided through drawing on specific capacities within the Secretariat or the broader system, or on other partnerships.

20. The past 10 years have witnessed the emergence of a community of mediation support professionals. In 2006, the Mediation Support Unit was established within the Department of Political Affairs to provide targeted technical support to United Nations and other mediation processes. In 2011, the European Union established a mediation support team and was followed shortly thereafter by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). Since then, the African Union, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) have each established mediation support offices within their secretariat structures, while the Southern African Development Community (SADC), the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and the Organization of American States (OAS) all have nascent mediation support capacities. Several other regional organizations have mediation focal points and some are contemplating the establishment of formal structures for mediation support within their secretariats. Similarly, some Member States have established specialized units within government structures to manage and support mediation and conflict resolution efforts. The United Nations Secretariat cooperates closely with these offices, including, when requested, through coaching and capacity-building on mediation and mediation support.

21. This report reflects on five broad elements of mediation support which can be mobilized at different times to facilitate a mediation process. These encompass

[4] The United Nations Guidance for Effective Mediation (2012) encourages mediators to include within their team, expertise in the design of mediation processes, country/regional specialists and legal advisers, as well as communications, logistics, administrative and security support. It is also important to ensure that mediation teams include both women and men at all levels. Thematic experts may also be included, or deployed as required.

support for (a) an enabling environment; (b) design of a mediation strategy and process; (c) effective operations; (d) implementation; and (e) building capacities.

A. Enabling environment

22. Effective mediation requires a supportive external environment, especially as so many of today's conflicts have a strong regional and international dimension. Broad alignment behind a process and the incentives and disincentives of other actors can be instrumental in encouraging the commitment of conflict parties. However, this is frequently difficult to achieve given that, as noted above, in many settings the external environment may be one of the factors escalating or sustaining the conflict. Nonetheless, I am determined to offer my services and those of the United Nations to generate more enabling environments for conflict prevention and mediation. This will involve not only working with relevant regional and international actors to achieve alignment behind a political strategy, but also efforts to help foster broad societal support for peace processes.

23. When united, the Security Council has been able to affect processes positively, as in Yemen in 2011-2014. In some instances, visits by the Council have been critical in signalling political support for a mediation effort. The missions to South Sudan and Ethiopia in September 2016 aimed at encouraging parties to address the needs and aspirations of the people of South Sudan through the implementation of the Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan. However, as noted, maintaining a clear course of action too often proves elusive, as developments in South Sudan sadly illustrate. Many factors influence the positions of the Council. Providing Member States with informed assessments and analysis on potential opportunities for engagement, as well as the implications of inaction, is a critical responsibility of the Secretariat.

24. On the ground, my special envoys and representatives also engage in efforts to generate a supportive political environment. In the Gambia, for example, my Special Representative for West Africa and the Sahel worked closely with the African Union and ECOWAS to resolve the 2017 electoral crisis through political messaging and visits conducted to demonstrate regional and international alignment. In South Sudan, my Special Representative for South Sudan and my Special Envoy for the Sudan and South Sudan are working with national, regional and international actors, including the African Union and IGAD, to build momentum for addressing the country's political cleavages and resuscitating the Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict. Similarly, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, my Special Envoy is working closely with national, regional and international partners in support of the political dialogue.

25. Political coordination may be institutionalized in the format of "friends", "contact groups" or "core groups". Some of these entities may be formed at the initiative of mediators, while others may be self-selecting or assembled by the conflict parties. In Guinea-Bissau, for instance, my Special Representative plays a central role in the coordination of the international community's support to the ECOWAS-led mediation. This coordination took place within the format of the so-called Guinea-Bissau P5 group, consisting of the African Union, ECOWAS, the Community of Portuguese-Speaking Countries, the European Union and the United Nations, which enabled the international community to speak with one voice.

26. Fostering public support requires the building of trust. In the Republic of Moldova, for example, UNDP and the United Nations family have supported the official settlement process by engaging in development interventions across the security zone on both sides of the Nistru/Dniestr River. These efforts facilitate

increased interaction and support the development of relations between the sides. Generating broad public support is often a challenging undertaking within a peace process, as illustrated by the case of Colombia, where the peace agreement reached between the Government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia — People's Army (FARC-EP) failed to win approval in a plebiscite held in October 2016. Communications campaigns and initiatives entailing outreach to civil society, local authorities and the public, which aim at the sharing of information on the agreements and underscoring the tangible benefits of peace, remain important in the implementation phase and can benefit from continued United Nations support.

B. Support for the mediation strategy and process

27. Getting the mediation process right can be as important as the substance of the talks. The agenda, sequencing of issues, composition of delegations and degree of inclusion are frequent subjects of dispute which would need to be confronted before parties engage in focusing on the substance of their grievances. In the absence of the will among the conflict parties to move forward, mediation teams may need to engage in "talks about talks" and shuttle diplomacy to prepare the ground. In addition to managing the dynamic between parties, they may need to manage dynamics within often fragmented or only loosely aligned groups, as well as concentric circles of regional and international interests. They will also need to assess how best to work with other mediation actors, including those from civil society, which may already be involved in a multiparty and multilayered process, and how to facilitate an approach that is inclusive of a wide array of other voices. Overall, mediation processes require a flexible, creative and adaptable strategy, which often encompasses an iterative process that evolves through many rounds of consultations.

28. Mediation support actors can assist in providing space for reflection and comparative experience on process design. For example, the Department of Political Affairs assisted the Office of the Special Envoy for Syria in brainstorming in-between rounds of talks in Geneva, including on their structure and design. It has supported similar exercises on behalf of my Special Envoy to Facilitate Dialogue in El Salvador and my Personal Representative on the border controversy between Guyana and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. Facilitated by the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) and the Office of my Special Envoy for the Great Lakes Region, the Department of Political Affairs also supported the African Union-led national dialogue in the Democratic Republic of the Congo on process design issues. Sometimes, process design support is needed for a highly specific dimension of a process. For example, the Department of Political Affairs provided support to the Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator in the Sudan in revising, together with the humanitarian actors, a humanitarian access negotiation strategy for the Two Areas of Blue Nile and South Kordofan States.

Thematic expertise

29. Confronted by what can be the maximalist positions of conflict parties, mediation teams seek to disentangle interests and needs with regard to a complex array of issues in order to help the parties agree on mutually acceptable arrangements. In high-pressured environments, they have to explore possible arrangements for stopping or reducing violence, while remaining attuned to their longer-term implications. A power-sharing agreement, for example, may have an impact on the space required to develop a workable constitution. Mediation support can assist by providing specific topical expertise. In addition to providing support

on process design for mediation and dialogue, the Mediation Support Unit of the Department of Political Affairs can deploy its experts to advise on issues including constitutions, transitional justice, inclusivity, gender, security arrangements and ceasefires, power-sharing, natural resources and reconciliation, so as to complement and reinforce the capacities of mediation teams.

30. Thematic expertise provided by the Mediation Support Unit has included advice to my Special Envoy for Yemen on the development of concepts centred on political transition and security arrangements and assistance to the United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM) and the Gaalkacyo Ceasefire Team Advisory Group on the implementation strategy of a local ceasefire agreement. In Myanmar, the Unit supported the conceptualization of the United Nations platform of support for the Joint Monitoring Committee. Technical assistance includes expertise on gender. For instance, in support of efforts to advance inclusive transition processes, the Unit advised the Libyan constitution drafting assembly and the United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) on the drafting of gender-related provisions for inclusion in the constitution. The Department of Political Affairs also provides thematic advice to its partners, which has included, for example, advice on ceasefire management provided to the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine. As part of United Nations technical support provided to the IGAD-led mediation for South Sudan in 2015, the Mediation Support Unit advised my Special Envoy for the Sudan and South Sudan on justice, accountability and reconciliation issues, including on the specific language to be utilized in the agreement for addressing conflict-related sexual violence.

31. The United Nations Secretariat houses various specialized units which provide technical support to mediation processes. The Department of Peacekeeping Operations Office of Rule of Law and Security Institutions provides support on issues such as disarmament, demobilization and reintegration and security sector reform, while its Office of Military Affairs advises on the implementation of ceasefires and security guarantees. For example, a permanent expert on disarmament, demobilization and reintegration was embedded within the Office of the Special Envoy for Yemen to support the De-escalation and Coordination Committee. The Electoral Assistance Division of the Department of Political Affairs has supported the Syria process by providing technical papers on various aspects of the electoral process and engaging with opposition and government representatives on matters related to post-agreement balloting events, including elections, and by briefing civil society groups, particularly on the political participation of women in any future balloting activities. In 2012, the Mine Action Service of the United Nations (UNMAS) provided an outline for Colombian negotiators on the contamination problem and on how mine action could support both the peace process and socioeconomic development in the longer term. While the primary responsibility of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat is to ensure effective humanitarian response, in specific contexts, such as the Mali peace talks in 2014 and the Bangui Forum on National Reconciliation in the Central African Republic in 2015, it has provided advice on humanitarian issues and language in mediation or peace processes.

32. Technical capacities relevant to mediation processes also exist within United Nations funds and programmes. In the Philippines, the United Nations Country Team, in cooperation with the World Bank, established a facility of advisory support for transition capacities to provide technical assistance to both sides in the lead-up to the final signing of the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro in 2014. The mechanism continues to provide technical assistance to the joint bodies created for the implementation of the agreement. In Colombia, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-

General for Children and Armed Conflict provided technical support to parties in developing a protocol for the release of children from the ranks of FARC-EP.

33. Finally, technical advice may also be provided by partners. For instance, the Cypriot-owned and leader-led negotiations have been supported by expertise from the European Union under the auspices of the Office of the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Cyprus. This support has been focused on assisting in the preparations for the implementation of the European Union acquis within a future Turkish Cypriot constituent State, upon the entry into force of the settlement agreement. The World Bank Group and the International Monetary Fund were also invited to provide expert technical assistance geared towards supporting the two communities in their efforts to achieve sustainable solutions to economic issues within a post-settlement Cyprus.

Inclusivity and local engagement

34. The fact that peace processes develop at different societal levels makes it imperative for the United Nations to connect with local initiatives. Addressing local-level grievances early on can avert their misappropriation for political purposes. More broadly, it is important that there be an expansion beyond the immediate conflict parties to engage those others — inter alia, civil society actors, including women, youth, religious groups and minorities — who can influence or have a stake in a peace process. Local consultations and dialogues can be linked with and brought into the formal process or they may be connected more informally, thereby broadening a sense of ownership, and thus helping to make agreements more sustainable.

35. Mediation teams can draw on the assistance of partners in convening and facilitating consultative processes which feed into activities at the peace table. In the Syrian process, for example, non-governmental organizations have assisted my Special Envoy in establishing and maintaining a women's advisory board and civil society support room to serve as a platform where Syrian civil society organizations can meet on the margins of the formal intra-Syrian negotiations. The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) and various international civil society partners have supported the United Nations mediation efforts in Yemen by conducting extensive dialogues with political and civil society leaders, women and youth groups so as to enable the testing of ideas and the building of understanding and acceptance within the context of potential areas for compromise. In Colombia, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights facilitated contacts between civil society and the parties. For example, the High Commissioner's representative in Colombia helped convey to the conflict parties the expectations of victims and their families with respect to justice, truth, reparation and guarantees of non-recurrence.

36. Local-level dialogues and peace initiatives can provide a basis for and act as complements to a formal peace process. In support of national reconciliation efforts in Libya, UNSMIL and the Peacebuilding Fund are strengthening community reconciliation processes and assisting Libyan national and local authorities, civil society and other partners in formulating a road map for national-level reconciliation. A mediation expert on inclusive facilitation processes was deployed in Solomon Islands by the Department of Political Affairs to support the Government in addressing the underlying causes of the conflict through inclusive dialogue, with a particular focus on women's participation.

37. Civil affairs components of United Nations peacekeeping operations promote dialogue between communities in order to defuse tensions and create space for local peace agreements. The United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization

Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) supported dialogue initiatives in that country by engaging customary and religious leaders, local authorities and representatives of local civil society organizations. The African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID) has organized peace forums and peace campaigns in that region to promote dialogue between nomadic communities and farmers as a means of confronting tensions that have regularly erupted in violent outbreaks and resulted in significant casualties and destruction, thereby putting a strain on the peace process.

38. The United Nations has also engaged in support of local mediation efforts led by our partners. In support of the SADC-led efforts towards facilitation in Lesotho, the United Nations Country Team, through the UNDP-Department of Political Affairs Joint Programme, assisted religious leaders in their work on facilitating dialogue among political actors. Mediators can draw on different mechanisms to ensure that voices of often marginalized communities are included in political processes. In Uganda, for example, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights conducted a study designed to explore perceptions of accountability, reconciliation and transitional justice among northern Ugandans as a contribution to the Juba peace talks 2006-2008. Unfortunately, those talks ultimately collapsed.

39. Non-governmental organizations can play a critical role as mediation support actors and they are often able to initiate and support quiet initiatives, including in conflict contexts where it may be difficult for United Nations actors to secure access. The Department of Political Affairs has been instrumental in establishing networks to better connect with non-governmental organizations and draw on their expertise as well as enhance collaboration among them. These include the Mediation Support Network which comprises primarily leading non-governmental organizations in the field of mediation; and the Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers, designed to enable the creation of stronger links with the non-governmental organizations that work with those important national actors.

Women's participation

40. It is one of my priorities to ensure that women participate effectively in peace processes. This is critical not only for reaching just and sustainable solutions, but also for building inclusive and resilient societies. Inclusive mediation processes create multiple entry points and diverse mechanisms for women's participation. To strengthen United Nations capabilities in this respect, the Department of Political Affairs established a specialized unit in 2016 to elevate the integration of women, peace and security issues into the Department's work. The Gender, Peace and Security Unit, UN-Women and gender advisers in peace operations support and advise mediation processes, including on women's participation and gendered conflict analysis.

41. In March 2017, the Department of Political Affairs launched Guidance on Gender and Inclusive Mediation Strategies, which provides mediators and their teams with practical advice on how to design gender-sensitive and inclusive processes. Examples of this kind of support include, in addition to the advice given to the women's advisory board in Syria, advice provided by the Secretariat in support of the efforts of UNSMIL to promote the inclusion of women in the implementation of the December 2015 Libyan Political Agreement. In Yemen, UN-Women has organized meetings within the context of the Yemeni Women's Pact for Peace and Security which focus on developing collective priorities. This has included engagement in consultations aimed at encouraging new ways of thinking in preparation for the resumption of talks.

C. Effective operations

42. To be effective, mediation efforts require sophisticated and flexible operational, logistical, security, administrative and financial support. The ability to structure and organize multilevelled meetings, often at short notice, requires specialist support. Mediation teams may also need additional surge resources to manage the movement of delegations, breakout rooms, working groups and various other elements.

43. Different entities of the United Nations system can support mediation efforts by providing a venue or hosting negotiations. The United Nations Office at Geneva, for instance, plays a key role in operational facilitation of processes, including through hosting both discreet and high-visibility meetings and managing the complex arrangements that accompany such talks. United Nations peace operations and field offices offer smaller, local venues for engagement. For example, the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Guinea-Bissau (UNIOGBIS) has provided a venue in that country for the dialogue process led by ECOWAS, and has regularly provided national stakeholders with transportation to enable them to hold mediation-related meetings outside the country. Within the context of the Geneva international discussions, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has provided a venue for the joint Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism in Gali town, chaired by my Representative to the Geneva international discussions. The selection of venue can be a sensitive matter and many of my special envoys and representatives rely on the support of Member States in assuming the financial, logistical, security and diplomatic responsibilities associated with offering conflict parties mutually acceptable venues for talks. I am grateful to Member States for this essential support to the United Nations and other mediation efforts.

44. United Nations peacekeeping operations, in addition to carrying out their mandates to support political processes, also provide logistical, administrative and security support to mediation efforts. The support provided by the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) for mediation and reconciliation efforts in that country includes provision of air travel and, when appropriate, security, to enable representatives of the Government and the National Assembly, as well as representatives of armed groups and religious and civil society actors, to attend meetings related to the peace process. To facilitate the Cypriot-owned and leader-led negotiations, the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP) provides logistical and security support to the meetings of the leaders, held inside the buffer zone, as well as administrative support to the Secretary-General's good offices mission through its Mission Support Component.

45. The fact that the dynamics and rhythm of mediation processes are in constant flux underscores the importance of the demonstration by the United Nations of flexibility and responsiveness with respect to the staffing and resource needs of mediation teams so as to maximize opportunities for constructive talks. To this end, additional staff capacities have been provided to support my special envoys in the Cyprus, Syria and Yemen talks at those critical moments when surge resources are required.

Funding

46. United Nations mediation efforts rely on several different mechanisms for funding. As mediation is a core mandate of the Department of Political Affairs, different capacities funded through the Department's regular budgets are dedicated

to mediation, both in regional divisions and in the Policy and Mediation Division. Mediation is also a critical component of the work of many special political missions, in particular the offices of special envoys of the Secretary-General (for example, for Syria and Yemen) and the three United Nations regional offices (the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS), the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa (UNOCA) and the United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia (UNRCCA)) as well as many country-based political missions (such as UNSMIL and UNSOM). Their work is funded through the regular budget provision for special political missions.

47. In recent years, however, given the limitations of the regular budget and increased demands, many mediation and conflict prevention efforts have been funded through extrabudgetary resources (voluntary contributions from Member States) obtained through the Department of Political Affairs annual funding appeal. These resources have played a critical role in allowing the Department to complement core capacities as well as the resources of special political missions, in response to the shorter-term or programmatic needs that arise in the course of a mediation process. Emergency windows have been established, including fast-track procedures, which facilitate access to funding in the particularly critical start-up phase. Resources have also been drawn from my unforeseen and extraordinary expenses account. The Peacebuilding Fund, established in 2005 and managed by the Peacebuilding Support Office, funds activities in support of countries emerging from conflict. In addition, the United Nations funds and programmes have resources that may be channelled to support mediation activities. Mediation is also an activity in peacekeeping operations; MINUSMA, for example, has a Mediation Unit which provides support to my Special Representative.

48. In Libya, UNDP administers extrabudgetary contributions from Member States which have financed some of the operational costs of the political dialogue process led by UNSMIL, as well as localized efforts during the Qanfoudah siege. In Guinea-Bissau, the support of the Peacebuilding Fund enabled UNIOGBIS to provide technical, logistical and financial assistance to ECOWAS delegations as well as for the organization of round-table consultations facilitated by ECOWAS mediators in Conakry. In the case of Yemen, Member States have provided funding support for my Special Envoy's efforts through a United Nations Office for Project Services-managed peace support fund. The funding has facilitated travel for Yemeni delegates to the talks, and the participation of key Yemeni civil society leaders in track-two consultations, as well for the inclusion of international and national experts in support of the process.

49. Member States have also provided valuable support by hosting donor conferences. Keeping the donor community informed regarding a peace process is important with regard to facilitating the coordination and alignment of external efforts, both to ensure essential financial support during the conflict (for example, in maintaining the functionality of key institutions) and to enable preparation for implementation. In the case of Yemen, the World Bank Group has managed regular virtual donor group coordination meetings which have allowed for briefings of the development community on the status of the political process and possible entry points. A World Bank adviser who was seconded to the Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General helped build a bridge between political and development actors which contributed to the channelling of international development assistance resources in the amount of 819 million United States dollars to UNDP, UNICEF and the World Health Organization (WHO) so that community support and national capacities could be secured in the midst of the crisis.

D. Support to implementation

50. The implementation of peace agreements and settlements is highly dependent on external assistance. The United Nations Guidance for Effective Mediation calls for the early involvement in the process of implementation support actors as well as donors to facilitate planning for implementation and help encourage compliance with the sometimes difficult concessions made during the negotiations. The implementation phase encompasses not only the immediate transition out of violence but also longer-term peacebuilding.

51. The period following the signing of an agreement requires sustained political support and good offices to ensure that trust is maintained between the signatories and that disputes arising from the challenges of implementation are resolved. In Guinea-Bissau, for example, UNIOGBIS has been working closely with political actors and civil society groups to provide political support for the implementation of the ECOWAS-brokered six-point road map and the Conakry Agreement. In Mali, my Special Representative has provided good offices to sustain the implementation of a fragile peace agreement.

52. The implementation of security arrangements often requires robust support. In many contexts, peacekeeping missions lead the verification and monitoring of ceasefires and security arrangements. The United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) chairs tripartite meetings, including the participation of senior officers from the Lebanese Armed Forces and the Israel Defense Forces, at which matters related to the cessation of hostilities and implementation of provisions of Security Council resolution 1701 (2006) are discussed. Similarly, the United Nations Mission in Colombia is the coordinator of the tripartite Monitoring and Verification Mechanism which oversees the ceasefire and cessation-of-hostilities provisions in the final peace agreement. The Mission established a gender strategy for the communications component of the Mechanism, which highlights the role that women who work within the context of the monitoring and verification process play in the implementation of the peace agreement. The United Nations has particular capacities for supporting disarmament, demobilization and reintegration processes in the implementation of peace agreements. For example, in Mali, MINUSMA provided disarmament, demobilization and reintegration expertise to the mediation team on the inclusion of provisions on security and defence in the 2015 peace agreement.

53. To assist the parties in addressing State fragility, peace agreements frequently include provisions on reforming or reinstating national and local authorities. In the Comoros, an agreement protocol was concluded in 2016 to enhance presidential and gubernatorial elections following the detection of shortcomings and irregularities in the early phases of the electoral process. The Department of Political Affairs Electoral Assistance Division supported the efforts of the national electoral institutions to ensure the implementation of the agreement during a required rerun on Anjouan Island, which contributed to the holding of peaceful and credible elections. In Mali, MINUSMA supports the implementation of the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation, for example, by helping to establish interim authorities in the regions of Gao, Kidal and Timbuktu. In South Sudan, the World Bank Group supported the establishment of the Fiscal and Financial Allocation and Monitoring Commission, a joint body established under the Comprehensive Peace Agreement to improve accountability and fairness in the allocation of nationally collected funds.

54. Broadening the sense of ownership and community investment in the implementation phase is an important contributing factor to a sustainable peace. In Mali, UN-Women has worked with the Ministry of Gender to bring together nearly

400 women from the Kidal region to discuss means of improving social cohesion in the region following the peace agreement. The United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) and the Peacebuilding Support Office have been supporting the establishment and functioning in that country of peace committees, hybrid structures designed to empower local leaders and communities to mediate, manage and settle conflict at the community level. In Colombia, over the past decade, and in anticipation of a peace agreement, UNDP built regional networks of over 700 civil society organizations in sectors impacted by the armed conflict. These networks, which include ethnic minorities, displaced populations, women and farmers' associations, have helped organize and empower civil society to contribute to subnational development and peacebuilding.

E. Capacity-building

55. The challenges confronted by mediation are fundamentally political in nature. However, strengthening the capacities of mediators, conflict parties and societies at large to engage in mediation processes enhances the chances of their success. Professionalizing the field of mediation and building institutional capacities through training and research, documenting practices and developing guidance, improve the organizational preparedness of the United Nations and its partners for maximization of opportunities for effective mediation.

Training as mediation support

56. Training on the technical aspects of mediation is one means of helping conflict parties and mediation teams to overcome deadlocks or inject creativity into a negotiation process, as this can create a less politicized environment for exchanges between them. The annual United Nations Ceasefire Mediation and Management Course, a collaborative initiative undertaken with the Governments of Norway and Switzerland, trains conflict parties alongside United Nations staff. Recent courses have included actors from Afghanistan, Colombia, Libya, the Philippines, Myanmar and South Sudan. In support of the work of the De-escalation and Coordination Committee formed under the cessation-of-hostilities agreement in Yemen, the Office of my Special Envoy organized a planning workshop for representatives of the Government of Yemen and the General People's Congress-Houthi to strengthen their capacity to plan and support the cessation of hostilities. The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), with the support of the Department of Political Affairs, has provided training in that country on negotiation techniques to the High Peace Council mandated to oversee the peace process. Such support can also be provided to Member State-facilitated processes. For instance, the Mediation Support Unit provided training to the National Democratic Front of the Philippines and the Government of the Philippines on ceasefire negotiation, implementation and management, in support of the efforts of the Government of Norway.

57. Another function of mediation training is to strengthen the capacities of civil society to participate in, support and facilitate dialogue and mediation, including as related to prevention. The United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) trained and enabled female members of the Implementation and Follow-up Committee for National Reconciliation in that country to contribute to local and national reconciliation processes. In the Great Lakes region, MONUSCO and the Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes Region supported the training of youth on mediation within the framework of the annual Goma Youth Forum, which brings together over 20,000 youth from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Burundi and Rwanda. In the Central Africa Republic,

UN-Women partnered with a regional non-governmental organization in training 100 women on inter-community conflict mitigation.

Professionalizing the field of mediation

58. I am prioritizing the strengthening of United Nations mediation capacities, building on efforts of the Department of Political Affairs to professionalize the United Nations approach to mediation and to provide support to partners. Broad recognition of the need to further professionalize the practice of mediation is illustrated by the growing number of mediation support entities.

59. The Department of Political Affairs offers training courses on mediation designed to strengthen the capacities of United Nations staff to support and manage mediation processes, which regularly include representatives of regional organizations and Member States. They range from a mandatory training course on gender, peace and security and an annual mid-level training course on mediation and facilitation skills training, conducted in cooperation with the Government of Sweden, to a high-level mediation course, conducted in partnership with the Government of Switzerland, for my special envoys and special representatives as well as the future generation of envoys. In addition, the Department organizes a range of specialized training programmes, for example, on religion and mediation, in partnership with the Governments of Finland and Switzerland, as well as tailored mediation training courses upon request. In Cyprus, for example, the Department provided training to UNFICYP uniformed personnel and civilian staff on conflict resolution skills and techniques. The United Nations Institute for Training and Research also offers a distinct mediation course as well as an online course in the public domain.

60. All peace processes are highly contextual; however, drawing lessons from past experience and investing in the institutional memory of the Organization are critical to our efforts to enhance capacity. The Department of Political Affairs maintains a repository of knowledge products and hosts a public website, UN Peacemaker, which enables access to reference materials. In December 2016, the Department launched the Language of Peace database, created in partnership with the Legal Tools for Peace-Making Project of the University of Cambridge, to facilitate the search for peace agreement provisions by themes. In addition to issuing the United Nations Guidance for Effective Mediation and Guidance on Gender and Inclusive Mediation Strategies, the Department has published various mediation guidance notes, such as the Mediation Start-up Guidelines (2011); Guidance for Mediators: Addressing Conflict-related Sexual Violence in Ceasefire and Peace Agreements (2012); and Natural Resources and Conflict: A Guide for Mediation Practitioners (2015). The Department also responds regularly to requests from the field for specific analysis and options papers. In addition, UNDP, in cooperation with the European Union and the Department of Political Affairs, has published a guidance note entitled "Supporting Insider Mediation: Strengthening Resilience to Conflict and Turbulence" (2014).

Enhancing capacities of regional partners

61. I have stressed that the United Nations is most effective in its role as an enabler, and wish to emphasize the importance of greater investment in partnerships. In recent years, the United Nations has increased its support to regional and subregional organizations that are seeking to strengthen their mediation capacities, for example, by advising on the establishment of specialized mediation support structures and mechanisms. The Department of Political Affairs, through its regional office in West Africa and liaison office to the African Union, has worked closely with the African Union and ECOWAS in establishing their in-house

mediation support units. The Mediation Support Unit has hosted staff from various regional organizations to exchange lessons and experiences on mediation support structures, including staff from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the League of Arab States, the Organization of American States, OIC, OSCE and ECOWAS. The Department has also provided technical support to the African Union and IGAD on designing and operating expert mediation rosters, and has collaborated with South Africa in providing mediation and negotiations skills training to a group of female diplomats predominately from SADC.

62. Training is also a useful means of helping to address specific regional challenges and develop collaboration. The United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa, for example, is focusing on strengthening the mediation capacity of the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), including through the training, in April 2017, of ECCAS secretariat and field staff involved in the subregional organization's mediation and preventive diplomacy efforts. The Department of Political Affairs has also facilitated exchanges of experiences between regional organizations in mediation support. In cooperation with the European Union, the Mediation Support Unit co-hosted a technical experts retreat with mediation support offices of the African Union, ECOWAS, IGAD, OIC and OSCE in Rome in 2016.

Enhancing national capacities in mediation and dialogue

63. Enhancing national and local mediation capacities is one of the priorities of my mediation initiative. I am encouraged by the number of Member States that have recently established dedicated capacities to support and coordinate mediation efforts. Several Member States have also established networks of local mediators and infrastructures of peace to serve as standing prevention and conflict resolution capacities and to promote a culture of mediation and dialogue within their communities. Member States and regional organizations have also established networks of women mediators in several regions, both to address local conflicts and to provide support to international peacemaking efforts. The establishment of the Southern African Women Mediators network, was followed by that of the Nordic Women Mediators Network and the African Network of Women in Conflict Prevention and Peace Mediation. The aim of these networks is to mentor and enable female mediation professionals and experts in respect of their peacemaking efforts.

64. Strengthening the capacities of national and local mediators through mentoring, coaching and training programmes constitutes an investment in conflict prevention. The Department of Political Affairs, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, the Peacebuilding Support Office and UNDP, often through engagement with Peace and Development Advisers, all conduct ongoing activities in this area. For example, in Guyana, the Guyanese for Peace initiative, facilitated by the Peace and Development Adviser, supported a peaceful process during the 2015 elections by encouraging dialogue and consensus building. In Uganda, UN-Women provided support to civil society groups for the establishment of a women's situation room which strove to mitigate election-related violence before, during and after the 2016 presidential election.

65. It is important to carry out more focused and coordinated action within the framework of these endeavours and to draw upon the capacities of the varied constituencies within communities, including women and youth. Local and national actors bring specific insights, cultural sensitivity, knowledge and contacts which are not always accessible to outsiders. Partnerships need to be generated with Member States and regional organizations as well as civil society organizations so as to empower these actors and build resilience at the local and national levels.

V. Conclusions

66. This report underlines the importance of mediation and mediation support for the broader goal of conflict prevention, one of the essential challenges of our time. The United Nations supports mediation and facilitation efforts which entails drawing upon its convening power and its capacities and partnerships across and beyond the system. I encourage my envoys and special representatives, as well as our partners, to make use early on of mediation support. I will do the same in my good offices role, as I firmly believe that by deploying the full range of tools available to us we enable more effective conflict prevention and peacemaking.

67. Despite the challenges we face at the global level, I am pleased to observe that we are increasingly aligning our activities in support of Member States, regional partners and other actors in their efforts to prevent and peacefully resolve political crises and violent conflicts. My strategy for mediation involves strengthening United Nations capacity and ensuring that the Organization maximizes its assets in support of mediation across the peace and security, development and human rights pillars. I believe strongly that the United Nations can do a better job if it acts in an integrated manner and with predictable funding supported by the membership at large.

68. Much more needs to be done to prevent and resolve conflicts and build resilient societies which can deliver on the pledge to leave no one behind — a pledge that underpins the Sustainable Development Goals. Together, we must recommit to our responsibility under the Charter of the United Nations to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war. I appeal to the Security Council and to all Member States to use their influence to send a strong and unwavering signal in support of efforts to end the burning conflicts which are eroding our capacity to pursue development. As I do so, I wish to thank in particular the Group of Friends of Mediation, which has played an important role in maintaining a spotlight on the critical tool of mediation. We must be similarly united in identifying and responding promptly to early signs of tension and potential conflict, while using all the means available to us to prevent and forestall violence.

69. We cannot and must not lose sight of the formal mediation processes that seek to resolve the most pressing conflicts of our time. However, if we are to combine these efforts with engagement at the local and community levels, we need to improve our ability to harness and align a full range of mediation and dialogue tools. This means drawing on different strengths within the system and working with partners in the international community and at all levels of the societies concerned. I believe that we have the necessary expertise, creativity and drive to meet this challenge. The need to do so is resoundingly clear.